



FINDING YOUR LEATHER TRIBE

**Leathermen Speak Out on
Authenticity, Self-acceptance
and Brotherhood**

**Edited by
Graham Clark**

PRAISE FOR *FINDING YOUR LEATHER TRIBE*

These breezy personal histories, each one illustrated with a hot photo of its author, are authentic tales of that second coming-out that refocused their lives and re-birthed them into the community of our Leather Tribe. This handsomely produced book is perfect reading for travel adventures, coffee shops, poolside lounging, and your bedside table.

—**Jack Fritscher**, *Drummer* Editor Emeritus, DrummerArchives.com



I loved reading about these gay leathermen from all around the world, and their dual gay and leather coming-out stories. These men powerfully write about, and represent, what makes the gay leather community so strong and vibrant. Their stories are beautiful—honest, insightful and uplifting.

—**Steve Lenius**, author, *Life, Leather and the Pursuit of Happiness*



Each tale of discovery and finding a place in the leather or kink community is not only compelling and informative, but the voices offer an array of opportunities for the reader to feel the experience on a deeper and more visceral level. *Finding Your Leather Tribe* is an important chronicle of the leather kink world and experience.

—**Owen Keehnen**, author, *Leatherman: The Legend of Chuck Renslow*

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For permission requests, contact the author and publisher, Graham Clark at ausleatherdaddy@ownmail.net.

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DISCLAIMER

The author has made every effort to ensure that the information in this book is accurate and current at the time of publication.

However, the leather, kink, and fetish communities, as well as laws and safety standards, evolve over time, and information may change or contain errors or omissions.

The content of this book is provided for general information, storytelling, and personal reflection only and does not constitute professional, legal, medical, or mental health advice.

The author and publisher assume no responsibility and expressly disclaim any liability for any loss, damage, or injury alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the use or misuse of any information contained in this book.

TO BILL WARD AND TOM OF FINLAND

whose visions of leathersmen
shaped our collective imagination

TO CHUCK RENSLOW

a pioneering leathersman,
community builder, and
guardian of leather history

TO THE LEATHER BROTHERS

who shared their stories
with courage and trust

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, on whose unceded Lands much of this book was dreamt, written, and lived.

I pay my deep respects to their Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who continue to care for Country across this continent. Sovereignty was never ceded.

Finding Your Leather Tribe is an Australian-authored book that shares queer and leather stories from around the world.

Wherever you're reading, I invite you to remember the First Peoples of the Lands on which you live, love, play, and gather in community.

CONTENT WARNING

This book contains real-life stories from gay leathermen around the world. Some readers may find certain themes emotionally intense or triggering. Please read at your own pace and take breaks when needed.

You may encounter references to:

- Homophobia, family rejection, and social exclusion
- Religious conflict and cultural stigma around sexuality and kink
- Physical and emotional abuse, including childhood trauma and intimate partner violence
- HIV and other health issues, illness, and death
- Substance use, mental health struggles, and loneliness
- Explicit references to sexuality, kink, and fetish (described in a non-pornographic, narrative way)

These stories are shared in the spirit of authenticity, mutual support, and community history. They are not intended as clinical advice, legal guidance, or a substitute for professional support.

If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed:

- Pause and step away from the text.
- Reach out to a trusted friend, partner, or community member.
- Consider contacting an LGBTQIA+ support line, mental health service, or local community organisation in your country or region.

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Part One shares personal stories from gay leathermen around the world.

Part Two offers a practical directory of groups, events, bars, parties, and retailers.

Part Three explores leather culture, suggests further reading, and explains how to stay connected with the tribe.

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INTRODUCTION

Graham Clark

This book began with an epiphany while reading Jack Fritscher's *The Life and Times of the Legendary Larry Townsend*. Fritscher notes that Townsend was the first to point out that while most gay men come out once, leathermen actually come out twice: once to their sexuality and again to their fetish.

That insight hit me hard. I realised that this was exactly what had happened to me. I came out as a gay man in 1986 and then, in 1990, I came out again—this time as a leatherman, after discovering leather and the leather community.

For many, coming out as gay feels like the end of the journey. For others—especially leathermen—it's only the beginning of a deeper search for belonging. Most leathermen come out first as gay, and later as leathermen, finding a tribe that reflects who they are in skin, heart, and hide.

Curious, I went looking for books that told this “second coming out”: stories of gay men who had walked this unique path of coming out twice. I searched for collections that spoke openly about that shift—from gay man to leatherman—but found nothing that truly captured this dual experience. That absence became the spark for this project. If the stories weren't there, they needed to be gathered, recorded, and shared. And so, this anthology was born.

This book is driven by a deep passion for leather culture and for the men who find their home within it. Many books explore what it means to come out as gay, yet almost none tell the powerful story of coming out a second time—as a leatherman. These stories have too often been overlooked, whispered, or lost. This project is about preserving and

honouring the real-life experiences of gay men and leathermen standing proudly in their full authenticity.

These coming out stories show others they are not alone, helping those still grappling with their identity believe in a life of understanding, support, and belonging. By reading how men navigated fear, family rejection, and internal shame—and claimed their leather identity anyway—readers catch glimpses of futures they might build for themselves. Through storytelling, isolation transforms into solidarity; uncertainty becomes something tangible: a name, a face, a voice that says, 'I survived this. So can you.'

This collection aims to educate, inspire, and celebrate the diverse experiences of leathermen everywhere. It's a resource for men at every stage: those with decades of leather history, and those just discovering what the word 'leatherman' might mean for them.

Whether you're a seasoned leatherman, a dedicated kinkster, or you're just beginning to explore the leather/BDSM/fetish scene, this book is filled with insight, advice, and stories that will teach you how real men claimed their leather identity and found their place in a global tribe.

While this collection focuses on gay leathermen, the wider leather/BDSM/fetish community includes trans and non-binary people whose stories are equally vital. Efforts were made to invite contributions from trans leathermen for this edition; however, no one who was approached chose to participate at this time. Their absence reflects the limits of this project, not the importance of their experiences, and future editions will continue to actively seek a broader range of voices. ❤️

Vishal

United States



Photo supplied by Vishal

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Finding Your Leather Tribe

Every leatherman has his story; mine is about not being afraid to be different and about finding community where I least expected it.

My name is Vishal, but within the leather scene, most people know me as Kamal or Kamal of India, and sometimes as Masked Architect. For me, claiming my leather identity was a long, complicated journey—one tied up in family, culture, identity, and the honest search for self-acceptance.

Growing up in Mumbai in a massive joint-family home, I always felt different: my mother was Marathi/Goan and my father Gujarati, so I straddled two traditions and languages. I learned early to be an outlier, never quite fitting entirely within either world. My childhood was filled with strong family ties, religious customs, and subtle expectations about how a boy should behave. Early on, though, I had inexplicable crushes—watching heroes in leather in movies like Batman or Spiderman filled me with excitement that I couldn't name.

I remember being just seven or eight and having strong reactions to these on-screen leather-clad characters, and by my teens, seeing men in biker gear in Bollywood films or even the smell and feel of new leather loafers thrilled me in ways I couldn't explain. I didn't even know what being gay was back then, let alone a leatherman. For years, I just observed leathermen online, kept my desires to myself, and thought maybe all gay men were into leather too—only to find I was alone in this.

Coming out as gay took a seismic shift: I had to move continents. In India, being gay felt like a dangerous stigma, not least because of family attitudes. I came out in the US during my master's degree—a time made easier knowing gay marriage had become legal. But embracing my leather identity was much harder.

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For a long time, I tried to date 'vanilla' boyfriends, suppressing my kinks, pretending I could live without them. I felt like I was cheating—sneaking home after bland dates to lose myself in kinky online friends, leather jackets, and porn. Wearing my first leather jacket in 2016 changed everything. Suddenly I was more alive, more myself. It also made me realise I was alone in this desire among my gay friends, which stung and clarified things in equal measure.

It was only in 2019 that I truly came out as a leatherman to friends, a few family members, and some close cousins. With my best friend in NYC—himself a leatherman—I felt encouraged to attend BLUF Sundays at Eagle NYC and Folsom Street East, year after year, together. My journey in stepping into my leather identity is still unfinished, since my parents are still getting used to me being gay; I doubt I'll ever be able to tell them about my kink side.

The biggest challenge for me was building the gear wardrobe: leather is expensive, and getting the full BLUF uniform took years of saving. Finding a local group was another challenge, because so many of my earliest friends were far away—sometimes continents apart. Still, the moment I came out as a leatherman, I felt more sexually alive and connected to myself than ever before. Suppressing my kinks just made them stronger and more demanding and embracing them was satisfying in a way coming out as gay never fully was.

My closest friends, cousins, and sibling never judged me. They encouraged me to explore. The New York City leather, rubber, and masker community has become my home. I march every year at Pride with the Eagle contingent, and what I once tried to hide is now my source of courage and confidence. Being a leatherman means power, authenticity,

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and breaking out of daily monotony into a vibrant world of fantasy where I'm truly seen.

There's still work to be done. As a brown demisexual leatherman, I see the stereotype of the "white leatherman" everywhere, and I'm determined to challenge it. My Hindu background complicates things—leather and beef are taboo, but I find a way to reconcile my faith with my truths. I keep architecture and kink mixed together on my Instagram, hoping to connect leather architects worldwide.

Leather has changed my life. It's given me lasting friendships, a sense of joy and acceptance, and a reason to be kind and open to all kinks and backgrounds. My first real kinky connection—with another leather architect in Italy—taught me kindness, patience, and the value of finding someone who truly "got" me.

If I have one message for the leather world, it's this: find a friend first. Talk to everyone, no matter age, size, gender or race. Because leather friendships last longer than the thrills of a hook-up. And from that foundation—real friendship—kindness and acceptance grow naturally. ❤️

Niels

The Netherlands



Photo supplied by Niels

Finding Your Leather Tribe

Leather is not just what I wear or desire; it's an essence—a way I move through the world, authentic and unhidden.

From as early as I can remember, leather called to me. As a three-year-old in Amsterdam, I was mesmerised watching a man step off his motorcycle, his long leather coat glistening under Dutch skies. I remember running over, compelled to touch the leather. Even then, the feel and smell of leather were intoxicating—something that stirred deep curiosity and wonder in me, long before I ever connected those sensations with sex, or even with men.

Growing up, I was lucky. My parents were open-minded, surrounded by gay friends, neighbours, and colleagues. Still, when I came out as gay at eighteen, there was an element of surprise in my family—maybe a gentle shock that this reality could happen within their own home. My father worried aloud that I might be attacked or blackmailed. But I told him, “If I’m open about who I am, I can’t be blackmailed.” I was almost two meters tall—a presence to be reckoned with. My boyfriends were always welcome in our home.

That open-armed welcome didn’t mean everything would be easy. My father, a product of the second world war, was sometimes wary. The war left its mark, and sometimes my parents argued—loud and often. My leather drew their suspicion. For them, leather was a harsh reminder of pain, of uniform, of an era they’d rather forget. So, within my family, I was careful, softer around the edges of my truth. With my friends—and especially in the city’s leather bars—I could breathe, could be fully and proudly myself.

My real tribe was already out there, waiting for me in Amsterdam’s vibrant gay scene. At eighteen, the same year I told my parents I was gay, a friend from the local gay

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organisation took me to my first leather bar. The moment I walked in—the music, the leather-clad bodies, the easy laughter—I knew I'd stumbled onto something that mattered. In truth, I was more attracted to the leather itself than to the men wearing it.

People often ask me when I “came out” as a leatherman, but there was never a defining moment; I've always been one. The answer feels simple, because there was never a defining moment, never the need for a declaration. I simply was a leatherman—always. My friends were mostly gay, many of them leathermen too. Only occasionally would I shield this side of myself from my parents, more out of respect for their memories than for my own shame.

When I look back, those days are filled with joy—late seventies and early eighties, when new bars opened and the same familiar faces gathered with anticipation. I recall picking up guys, the thrill of a midnight bike ride through city streets, the unforgettable rush of new sexual awakenings. The leather community was a place of real friendship and solidarity—there for each other in the best times and, as AIDS began to shadow our world, in the very worst. Together, we survived, we mourned, and we kept our traditions alive.

My advice to those just beginning to explore leather: build a community around you, do it safely, avoid drugs, and invest in pieces that make you proud. This is not about fitting into someone else's group, but about letting the right people find you, just as they found me.

Looking to the future, I hope the new generation learns our history—knows the stories of pain and pride, of unity and loss that shaped us. The bars may have emptied a bit, the world changed by the internet and by time, but I see fresh faces eager to discover the look, smell, feel, and taste of leather. The community that raised them will still be here,

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offering the same thing it gave me: a place where you can be fully yourself, and know you're not alone in it.

And as for me, I'm grateful every day to be a leatherman. It has given me love, friendship, and the courage to stand—tall and open—just as I am. ❤️

Raphael

Brazil



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Finding Your Leather Tribe

My relationships remain rooted in love, but when love and leather come together, it's something magical.

Claiming my leather identity was not a single moment—it was a series of awakenings and courageous steps along the path of my life.

I grew up in the countryside of São Paulo, surrounded by love from my mother and grandmother, but always with a sense that I was different. My childhood was quiet, dedicated to studies and classical music, and I often felt like I was on the outside looking in. I didn't know then, but my first real fascination began early: as a boy of five, I already felt drawn to boots—there was something about their power, their presence, that stirred something deep in me.

When I entered medical school, I did what many do—I tried to fit in, even dating a woman for six years. After graduation, moving to the city, I realised I was gay and came out, stepping into sunlight after years in shadow. Around the same time, I stumbled across the leather community online. The sight of leather, its smell, the touch, the virility it radiates—it woke up a part of my soul.

It didn't take long for me to start buying leather and boots, always on my own at first, and going to fetish events to see what this world was about. My first party is a memory I'll never forget—the producer greeted me with a smile and said, "Finally, we have you here with us!" In that moment, I felt seen and welcomed, like a missing piece of myself had slid into place.

Embracing my leather identity has been a different journey than coming out as gay. With my family and friends outside the community, I simply don't talk about it—not from shame, but from privacy. This part of me is for those who

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understand it. Yet when I competed for Mister Leather Brazil, friends who'd never attended a fetish event came to cheer me on. That meant everything.

There have been challenges—misconceptions and criticism from people who don't understand what leather means to us. Being a leatherman means living in my authenticity, radiating my true self with power and pride. Leather gave me freedom, independence, and a sense of strength I never knew before.

I've learned not to let life pass me by, not to live for the expectations of others, but rather to step forward boldly and claim happiness where I find it. I wear my leather and boots as naturally as breathing—they are part of who I am, every day.

To anyone reading this, searching for themselves within the leather world: go ahead. Don't wait for permission. Wear your boots, attend the party, reach out to a friend in the scene. Life is too short to live on the sidelines. In leather, I found the tribe I didn't know I was looking for. ❤️

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graham Clark is an out, proud gay man and leatherman whose journey has been shaped by moving cities, coming out, and finding his place in the gay community. Those first few years after relocating were a blur of new friendships, late-night conversations, and hard-won self-acceptance as he learned to live as his most authentic self. Drawn by both curiosity and the warmth of the people he met, Graham found his way into the leather scene and has since become an active part of the community it offers.

He has a background in education and digital learning design and is passionate about creating inclusive, accessible learning experiences that help people connect, grow, and thrive.

Graham lives in Melbourne, Australia with his partner and can often be found sipping a Campari spritz and catching up on RuPaul's Drag Race. This is Graham's first book, exploring what it means to come out twice: first as a gay man, and then as a leatherman.



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PRAISE FOR FINDING YOUR LEATHER TRIBE

With leathersmen and leather tribe in mind, editor Graham Clark now curates and carries the leather-identity torch we lit 50 years ago in the leather bible of *Drummer* magazine in 1975. Our ancient leather voices welcome and applaud the 22 new leather voices collected in this amazing book of crisp personal stand-up testimony from men who, after coming out the first time into gay sex, have dared come out a second time into leather.

These breezy personal histories, each one illustrated with a hot photo of its author, are authentic tales of that second coming-out that refocused their lives and re-birthed them into the community of our Leather Tribe. This handsomely produced book is perfect reading for travel adventures, coffee shops, poolside lounging, and your bedside table.

I enjoyed all the leathersmen immensely. So, if you want a great conversation starter for your next trip to a leather bar or leather contest, you know what to do!

—**Jack Fritscher**, *Drummer* Editor Emeritus, is the author of 30 gay and leather history books including *Leather Blues*, *Profiles in Gay Courage: Leatherfolk, Arts, and Ideas* and *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*. A veteran elder of the leather community, he is also founder and keeper of www.DrummerArchives.com where you can research leather history and read all his leather books free.

PRAISE FOR *FINDING YOUR LEATHER TRIBE*

In the new book, *Finding Your Leather Tribe* editor Graham Clark has crafted a fascinating and informative look into the meaning and importance of self-acceptance and finding community.

Through the personal accounts of nearly two-dozen leathermen, the reader has the opportunity to either understand or reaffirm the importance of the communal bond. Exploration and discovering one's sexual truth requires trust and a feeling of safety.

Each tale of discovery and finding a place in the leather or kink community is not only compelling and informative, but the voices offer an array of opportunities for the reader to feel the experience on a deeper and more visceral level.

There is so much in these pages, things not so much explained as shared—the self-realisation, the shedding of pretense and inhibition, and the sense of belonging.

Suffice it to say, *Finding Your Leather Tribe* is an important chronicle of the leather kink world and experience.

—**Owen Keehnen**, author, *Leatherman: The Legend of Chuck Renslow*, *Man's Country: More Than a Bathhouse* and *Gay Chicago Memories*

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I loved reading about these gay leathermen, from all around the world, and their dual gay and leather coming-out stories. These men powerfully write about, and represent, what makes the gay leather community so strong and vibrant. Their stories are beautiful—honest, insightful and uplifting.

Some of the stories shared by these men reminded me of my own stories. There were many details that resonated with my own experiences as a gay leatherman. But there also were details and ideas that were new to me and that made me think, “Wow, I’ve never run into that before!”

The photos are a splendid addition to the text. Seeing the men makes it easier to relate to their stories. In every photo, and in every story, each man’s leather pride shines from the page.

I appreciate these men for telling their stories so beautifully, and I appreciate Graham Clark for collecting and sharing them with us. As I experienced these men’s stories, I felt happy—and lucky—to be a member of their tribe.

—**Steve Lenius**, author, *Life, Leather and the Pursuit of Happiness*; Leather Life columnist for *Lavender* magazine from 1995 to 2023

PRAISE FOR

FINDING YOUR LEATHER TRIBE

An essential blend of practical resources and global voices, capturing the diversity and vitality of the modern leatherman's world.

Graham Clark curates an international anthology that invites readers to see their own journeys reflected in the lives, struggles, and triumphs of others.

The accessible resource guide serves as a welcoming gateway — a concise introduction to places, events, and experiences waiting to be explored.

—**Vincent Andrews**, author, *The leatherboy Handbook III* and *The Leather and BDSM Handbook*

CONNECT WITH ME

Thank you for spending your time with this book – it means a lot that you made it this far. If the ideas here have been useful, this does not have to be the end of our conversation.

Stay in touch: Newsletter

The best way to stay connected is through my monthly email newsletter. Each edition includes practical tips, behind-the-scenes insights from my work, and updates on new projects, events, and resources you can use right away.

Join here: <https://findingyourleathertribe.com>

No spam, no daily blasts – just one thoughtful email each month, plus the occasional special update when there is something genuinely worth sharing. You can unsubscribe at any time with a single click.

Follow along: Instagram

If you prefer to explore a little more first, you can check out my Instagram for day-to-day leather life, event snapshots, and community moments.

Find me at: <https://www.instagram.com/ausleatherdaddy/>

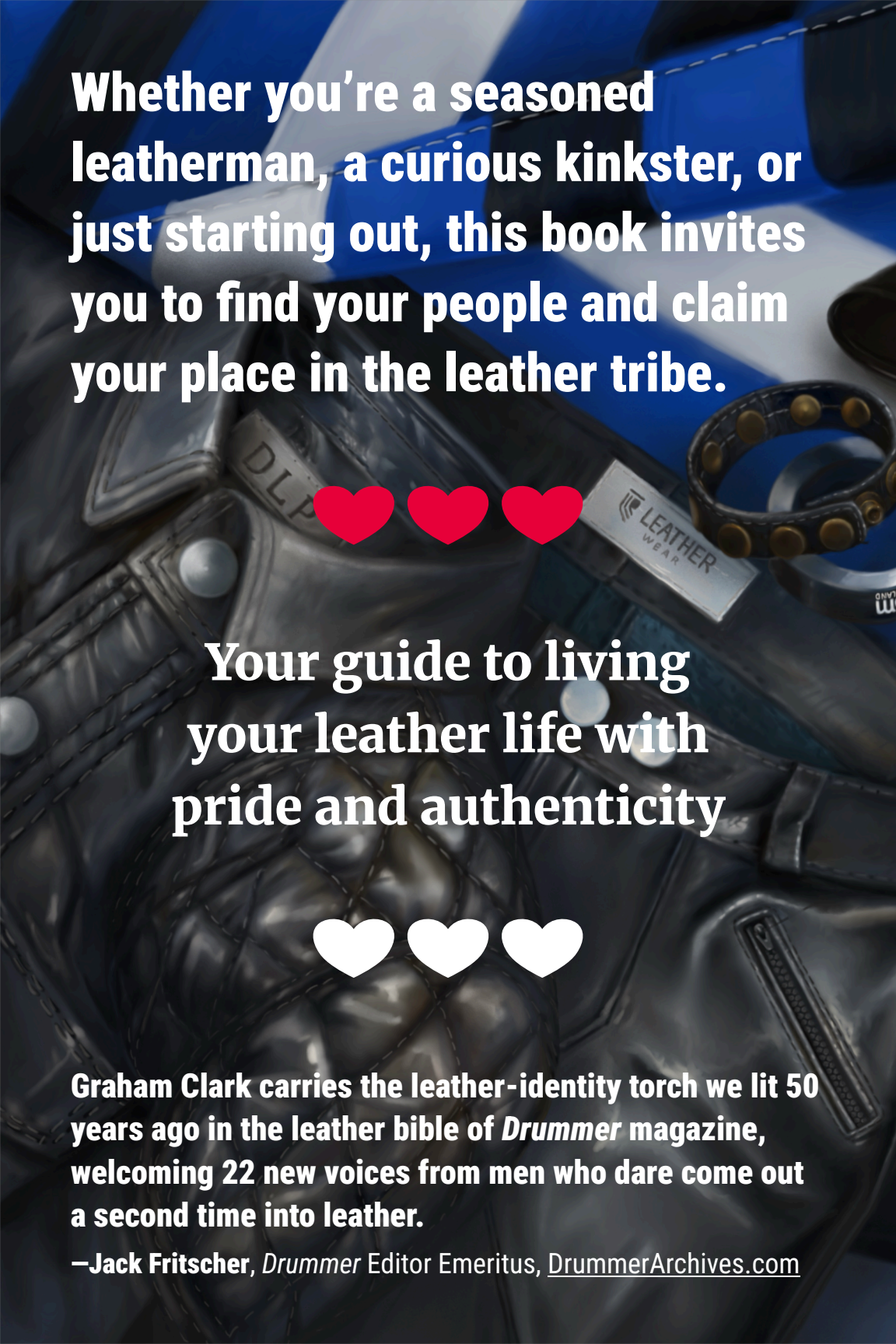
Wherever you choose to follow along, thank you again for reading and for being part of this journey.

Share your feedback and your story

Finding Your Leather Tribe is an ongoing project. If this book has raised questions for you, if you noticed something missing, or if you have a story you'd like to see represented in a future edition, I'd love to hear from you.

I'm especially keen to hear from trans men, non-binary leatherfolk, leathermen of colour, and men from regions and cultures that don't often appear in leather anthologies.

You can reach me via email at ausleatherdaddy@ownmail.net or through the contact form on the [Finding Your Leather Tribe](https://findingyourleathertribe.com) website.



Whether you're a seasoned leatherman, a curious kinkster, or just starting out, this book invites you to find your people and claim your place in the leather tribe.



**Your guide to living
your leather life with
pride and authenticity**



Graham Clark carries the leather-identity torch we lit 50 years ago in the leather bible of *Drummer* magazine, welcoming 22 new voices from men who dare come out a second time into leather.

—Jack Fritscher, *Drummer* Editor Emeritus, DrummerArchives.com